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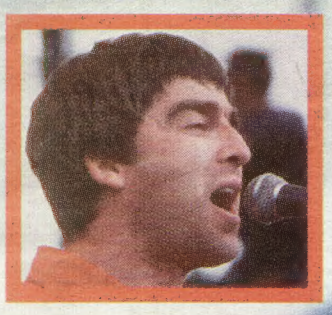

Symposium? Move over grandads, it's... HANSON

POPSHOP: KENICKIE consume New York

RADIOHEAD RULE OK

Today – the world... Tomorrow – the universe!

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THE *NME* GLASTONBURY GUIDE!

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Radiohead photographed by Renaud Montfourny

...And salute RADIOHEAD, shyest, coolest, smartest rock megastars on the planet. As their sensational 'OK Computer' album gets released, STUART BAILIE ruthlessly pursues them and their all-star mates (U2! REM!) around the world. From pukefest awards ceremonies in Dublin, via tranquil Oxford beer gardens, through to the celeb-studded benefit for Tibet... it's all here... OK? Paranoid Polaroid: MIKE DIVER and RENAUD MONTFOURNY

VIVA LA MEGA

Whaaah! Screech! Yakka yakka! They're incoming from all sides. Fierce noises from the right, altercations from behind. Just now there's a stormy advance on the left – only seconds before it comes howling through. All Thom Yorke can do is hold tight, neck some more beer and hope that the mayhem will pass.

Ridiculously, this is friendly fire. Guys are moving in with their hands open in welcome, wanting to connect with the singer, to assure him that he's a great bloke and his music rocks like no other. Musicians are shouting about how 'The Bends' has inspired them – completely rewriting the lexicon for guitar bands everywhere, a real milestone.

The bawling drunks before him have found the secrets of the universe, except they've forgotten how to get the words out. Girls are smiling, wanting to engage Thom in intelligent conversation. But that, sadly, may not be possible. An occasional tape recorder clicks on beneath his nose and the singer does his best, but he burbles gamely, his sentences spinning into each other, much of the sense gone.

He brightens for a bit when somebody mentions his American friends from the East Coast – Tanya Donelly and Kristin Hersh. His face is illuminated now, with a great childlike smile and he's raving about the latter's 'Hips And Makers' record, how it touched him deeply – how the author of so many ace Throwing Muses records could manage such a formidably great solo record as well.

All this is happening at the Paradise Lost nightclub in the centre of Belfast, an annex of The Europa Hotel. It's February 20, and the mix of Radiohead's new album has recently been finished. There's no turning back now – rather it's the perfect occasion to celebrate another job well done, to wet the newborn, still-sweaty head of 'OK Computer'.

Earlier in the evening there had been grand speeches and a prize to collect. *Hot Press* magazine, Ireland's equivalent of *NME*, had invited the band over to their annual awards. Radiohead were honoured as the Best International Live Act to play the island in '96. Many of the well-wishers were still raving about that show at The Olympia Theatre in Dublin, and when Thom picked up his trophy, he'd mentioned the energy the crowd gave the band that night. So everybody cheered again and again.

The vibe around the Radiohead table was wide-eyed and euphoric, like the best school trip ever. Maybe they just hadn't been out much lately. Colin Greenwood was powering down the Heinekens, making friends. Larry Mullen from U2 was sitting to his left, and he started passing fresh beers over.

Larry was offering advice as well, remembering that when U2 had been making their first impact in America, Bruce Springsteen had come backstage to say hello. The New Jersey boy told the young Dubliners that they'd probably do great things in the music world, but that they should never, ever forget to have fun while it was going well. So here was Larry, passing on the word from one generation to another. Colin accepted this as a flattering and important ritual.

Tim from Ash, he came over at the end. He was looking at Thom, a scary expression on his face. "Do you like rock'n'roll?" he bellowed. Thom was speechless.

Meanwhile, Colin was trying to explain how the new LP sounded to some old acquaintances. "If you thought there were no singles on 'The Bends', you should hear this one," he laughed.

"It's like a... stoned Radiohead."

All that was a couple of hours ago; now the aftershow party is in session. All of Radiohead, bar the singer, have gone missing on manoeuvres. A few of them had gone searching for the missing award, found it under a table, and then mislaid it again. So at this point Thom finds himself alone, battered by well-wishers, rapidly losing it in the fracas.

Some musicians would love this much attention. Admiration from punters and players, from the media and the industry people alike. But Thom doesn't care for it. He has this thing about being liked purely because of his musical status; it's as if people are stripping him of his personality, pinning him up like a species, something fixed and recognisable.

One of the people who's helped him deal with this is Michael Stipe. They became good mates on the 'Monster' tour of '95, and the REM singer was able to impart some useful advice about the bum side of success and the danger of overexposure.

"He's a lovely bloke," Thom said earlier, "and he's coped with fame very well – which helps me, 'cos I find myself having to fight certain aspects of it at the moment. I don't like my old friends talking to me like I'm a pop star, 'cos it makes me feel like I'm becoming two-dimensional."

So, when he meets a journalist who'd interviewed Radiohead a few times before, he starts asking questions about the other guy's life – finding out about his family, his friends and aspirations. And then the singer locks his arm around the journo's elbow, maybe for some physical support, possibly also to indicate that the pair shouldn't be disturbed. It's a bizarre sight, like a pair of awkward newlyweds, a perfectly squiffy odd couple.

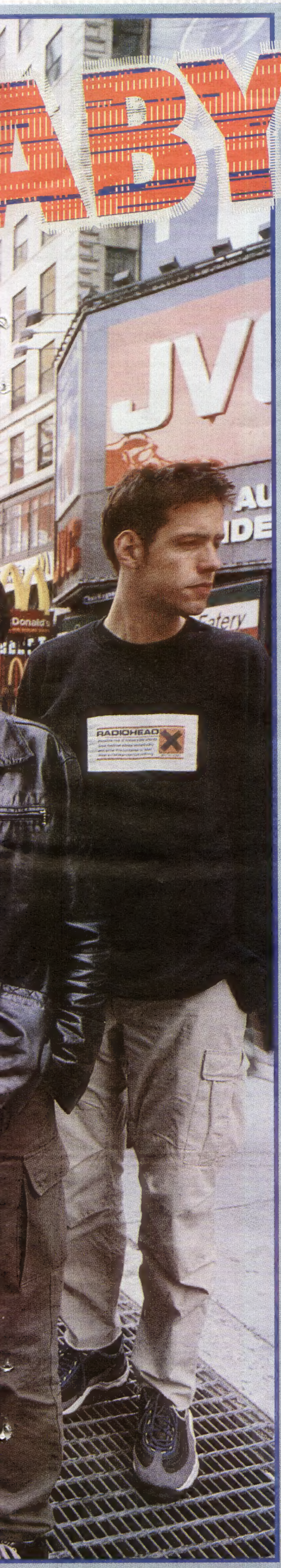
This works for a bit, but Thom still can't take the attention away from himself. His neck tightens, his shoulders hunch. He reaches for his hat – huge, navy, and woolly – and he pulls it down over his forehead, obliterating his features.

Consciously or not, he looks like Robin, the cartoon slacker with the knitted hat, a creation of the Swedish animator, Magnus Carlsson. Robin became a huge hit with Radiohead during the recording work for the album at Jane Seymour's mansion near Bath in '96. They'd taped lots of the Friday night transmissions from Channel 4, and they'd laugh at the little guy's hard life, at his mixture of innocence, sadness and guile.

There was a fave episode in which Robin dreamt he was being pursued by a French mime artist who copied all of his moves and mannerisms. It was a

Those gorgeous, pouting 'Head hunks in full: (l-r) Phil, Thom, Jonny, Colin and Ed

ABYTES!



Thom glum: staying pout for the summer

terrifying concept, and there was only one way to resolve the situation. Robin got a gun and blew the guy's head off.

That's hardly Thom's style, though. But he's never going to be anonymous with his hat pulled down either. Everyone else is in their party clothes. He's wearing wrinkled cargo pants and a baby-blue shirt, the collar all stretched and twisted. He's unmissable, and the compliments are firing in once more.

Yakka yakka! Whaaaah! He can't fit any more beer in. It's been time to quit for at least an hour – to retreat to his foxhole and let somebody else take the flak. Thom staggers to the elevator. He goes up to his hotel room and vomits everywhere.

ED'S DAD sounds like a great bloke. He rates Primal Scream, reads the music press and rips the piss out of old Radiohead videos. He actually throws parties, bringing all of his mates around for a few beers, for some banter and the inevitable rerun of the 'Pop Is Dead' promo. That's his favourite.

"What's going on there, then?" he'll ask his boy, jabbing at the remote control switch. "You call that a *music* video? So why is there a lizard in that scene? Explain it to me." He rewinds the tape just for the hell of it, thoroughly enjoying himself, as his guests chortle at the grand pretentiousness of it all. "Look. A *lizard*. Call yourself an O'Brien? Do you, son?"

Ed's grandfather came over from Tipperary many years ago. The guitarist still goes out there on occasions, marvelling at the way his relations can drink until two in the morning and then get up at five to milk the cows. Loads of them turn up whenever the band play in Ireland, and there's often a scary scene when a member of the O'Brien posse misbehaves, causing Ed to step over and play the peacemaker.

Meanwhile, Colin Greenwood is thinking about some of the other video crimes the band have committed. He can barely talk about the 'Stop Whispering' effort, when they were persuaded by the American director to dress in linen and some kind of bizarre headgear, striking cute poses. Maybe the intention was to make them seem very English, or whatever, but they just came across as royal prannies.

Which is probably why the band are philosophical about their current success. After all, it's been an uneven history. They've had their early hit with the 'Creep' single, sold masses of their 'Pablo Honey' album in America, lost their momentum. When they put out 'The Bends', it didn't move in spectacular amounts until a few singles registered, when the ordinary fans spread their reputation and the end-of-year polls revealed it as a treasured LP.

So there's no danger of being overconfident then?

Ed: "The thing is, when 'The Bends' was released, we felt we were still fighting people's preconceptions. We thought it was great – we don't release a record unless we think it's really good. But we'd had no critical acclaim, which is fair enough, because we were an incredibly inconsistent band.

"It's not surprising people thought we were crap. And we'd released dodgy singles– 'Pop Is Dead' – I have to admit that was a rubbish record."

Colin: "As Keith Richards would say, it's the price of an education…"

It's margarita time in Oxford, May 29, as Ed, Colin and Phil warm their bones in a beer garden and the chaps – and how better to describe these three with their ever-pulsating brains, with their top humour and proper manners – have been checking the monthly music mags. It seems that everybody rates 'OK Computer' as a mighty record. Old *NME* troopers like Nick Kent and Paul Morley have been commissioned to write critiques – the vibe being that here is a special occasion to celebrate. Even *Rolling Stone* magazine has marked it out for a lead review, complete with a suitably mad illustration.

You may be wondering how Radiohead react to these fervent write-ups. Here's what they say: "God, you can see Thom's cold sore on that photo."

"That just makes me look fat."

"What the f—'s going on there? What do I look like?"

"Not a bad review, though."

So isn't it nice to read the reviews and the cover stories you always dreamt about?

Phil: "Yeah, but you dream about good pictures of yourselves as well."

Colin: "The novelty of reading about yourself wears off after the first record or so. After a while, you just get detached from it. Because obviously it's got nothing to do with you. You realise the important thing is that it should be entertaining and mildly informative and vaguely based in fact."

"Thom said he wanted the 12 songs on 'OK Computer' to be sung with 12 different types of voice. I think Thom at times has had a hang-up about his voice. And the f—er can sing anything – he can reduce you to tears." – Ed

AS THE afternoon wears on and the booze kicks in, Colin starts reminiscing about the band's days at school together, and somewhere down that path remembers that himself and Thom once took part in a school dramatisation of the TS Eliot poem, *The Wasteland*, and that his mate was "really into all of that". You find this interesting because the poem's punchline is "the horror, the horror". 'Paranoid Android' tails off with *"the vomit… the vomit"*.

Both pieces are stridently modern, like nothing that's been before, and are told via a series of fractured viewpoints, under great duress.

Both call out for God's burning rain to come down and wash away the anguish and suffering that's so visible all around. Both *The Wasteland* and 'Paranoid Android' are the result of laborious editing; splicing together a series of very different sections.

But of course you might discard that idea and run with the line about the, *"kicking, squealing Gucci little piggy"* and relate it to Charles Manson and the Tate murders, "piggy" being one of the cult's buzz words. The line also recalls the ritualised schoolboy sacrifice in *The Lord Of The Flies*.

Neither reading is particularly far-fetched when you listen to another new Radiohead song, 'Climbing Up The Walls', in which a psychotic intruder aims *"15 blows to the skull"* of his victim. Yum.

It's also worth noting that Thom was raving about JG Ballard's *Crash* at the time of 'My Iron Lung', and that the first song on the new LP, 'Airbag', features the line, *"In a jackknifed juggernaut/I am born again"*. Basically, whatever the specific references, it's clear that these are stories and head-trips rather than confessions. The other Radiohead members approve.

Colin: "I think Thom's still trying out lots of different things. There's never been a set formula from the first record onwards. It's that boredom thing, too."

Ed: "Thom said about this album anyway, he said of the 12 songs he wanted it to be sung with 12 different types of voice. I think Thom at times has had a hang-up about his voice. And the f—er can sing anything – he can reduce you to tears.

"That was one of the reasons why we did take a long time over the recording of the album. We had to get the vocals right, 'cos he didn't want to sing it entirely straight. That was one of the things about 'The Bends', where he did sing it entirely straight for what it was."

Phil: "Which was great for those songs, 'cos it made them more introspective. Anything else would have been this real smokescreen between you and the songs. But this new album comes from a lot of different angles."

Ed: "Thom's funny about vocals anyway. Vocals are the most important thing on any song – the music can be shite but redeemed by a great vocal take. but Thom doesn't see it like that. It's almost as if the music is more important and the vocals are an afterthought. But it's not like that."

Colin: "With 'Paranoid Android', what happened was that we recorded the first bit and we were really into it. Each of the other bits had to be as good as what had been before. It was like the record in miniature – really exciting, but it just raised the stakes each time and piled the pressure on."

Colin dates the start of the record back to the summer of '95 when they supported REM on tour. He recalls playing 'Climbing Up The Walls' at a soundcheck at the Hershey Stadium. Peter Buck was checking their progress from the sound desk, and when they'd finished, he walked away, whistling the

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tune with his hands in his pockets. 'No Surprises', 'Let Down' and a different version of 'Airbag' were coming together. The latter took its final shape after Phil, inspired by the Mo' Wax sound, carved up a recording of his own drumming, giving it that artificial, reconstituted feel. Meanwhile Alanis Morissette audiences were getting a ten-minute version of 'Paranoid Android' during last summer's tour, as the band tested out a wiggy organ outro.

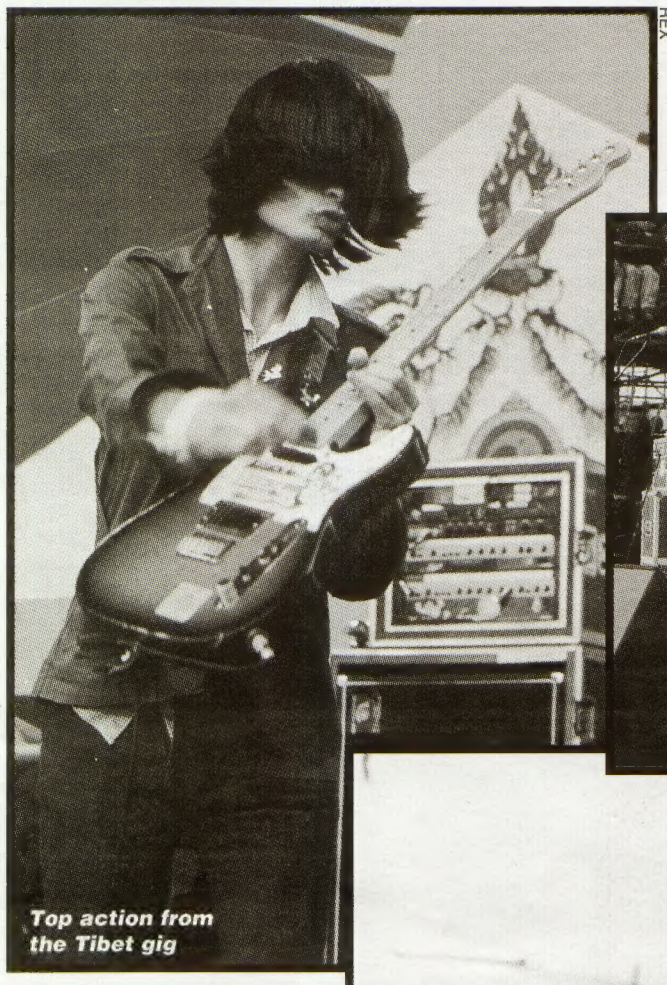
He said, 'I've listened to 'OK Computer' five times now. and I think it's majestic'."

So might Radiohead develop a strut to go with their rising popularity?

Colin: "I think about this a lot, with Oasis and stuff, that confidence factor. But what would it be that would make one *strut*?"

A Number One record in America?

"Yes, but I still like to think that we'd find a reason to be unhappy."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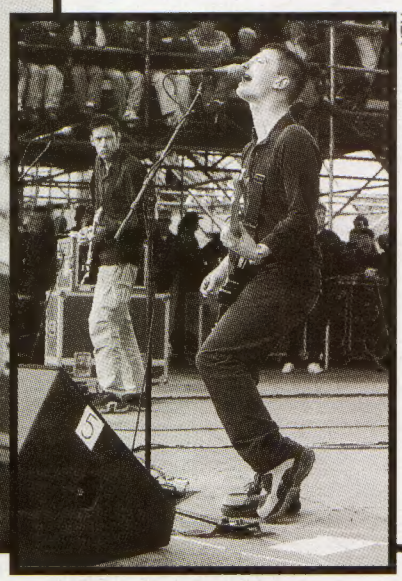
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Top action from the Tibet gig

"Luckily," says Colin, "those fans were all in their teens, so with the trauma of adolescence and stuff, they'll forget about it. It was the Ronnie Corbett moment in the set. Time to go to the toilet."

Having recorded 'Lucky' for the 'Help' album in five hours, the band were hoping for a quick result for the album. Jane Seymour's ballroom sounded great for the band, while Phil set up his gear in the kids' room, sharing it with the cuddly toys. Colin used to joke that it looked like a cross between *Rock School* and *Blue Peter*.

They recorded two songs on the first night. About a third of the album was sketched out in the third week. Of course it couldn't last. The music became more complex, until they realised after a few difficult months that it would be better returning to the early versions, stripping the embellishments away.

Ed: "It's funny, I was going over some video footage that I'd done, and it ends on day three. Everyone's really happy. Colin's given up smoking, he's really happy about it. This is a great place, we're all saying. And it's funny how there's no recordings after day three."

Colin: "Its like that bit in *Apocalypse Now*, when Martin Sheen was going down the river and he's calm..."

Ed: "Then you get to the bridge and there's flares and rockets and trenches and it all goes wrong. We thought that this self-producing lark was a piece of piss. When we've recorded an album before, the producer is there to pull you up and suggest when things are going wrong. So we had to learn that, the non musical side of it, and the discipline."

So Ed, what's your dad's critical opinion of the record?

"Well he rang the other day.

IT'S SATURDAY, June 7, and Jonny Greenwood is breakfasting at the Westway Diner, on 9th Avenue, New York. He spoons down his muesli topped with banana and explains how he likes the ambience of this funky place, remembering that last time he was here, it was full of overweight cops, spitting into their food.

In four hours' time he'll be onstage before thousands of people at the Tibetan Freedom Concert, a bill that also features, U2, Patti Smith, Noel Gallagher, Foo Fighters and Porno For Pyros. But he doesn't seem fussed. When you remind him that the recent Radiohead gig at Toronto sold out in 48 seconds, he dismisses the hype, pointing out that it was only a small gig – a mere 1,000-seater – and that the record company probably bought up loads of tickets beforehand.

Jonny has the ability to partition off aspects of his personality.

There's no sign of the frenetic axe-monster who puts much of the danger and disarray into the band's sound – such a physical style that he routinely gouges his hand on the stings. Now he's also obliged to wear a metal arm brace when he plays, to redirect some of the stress.

"The 'Paranoid Android' video's been censored by MTV. They've taken out all the nipples. Yet they leave in the stuff where a man's sawing through his limbs, which is peculiar." – Jonny

This is the same guy who's now talking about the Kenneth Williams diaries and the wilfully strange life of playwright Joe Orton. You remind him that back in '93, he was killing time on tour buses by listening to cassette dramatisations of Sherlock Holmes stories. That's still a fun practice, he claims, only now he's got a spoken-word version of the Samuel Pepys chronicles, a lurid flashback to London life around the time of the Great Fire.

"They must have been great, bawdy times," he laughs. "Lots of wild sex being had with dirty old whores. It's a classic. A great way to relax when you're in a foreign country."

After completing 'OK Computer', Jonny says he went on holiday with his wife to Italy, where he checked out the arena in Pompeii, scene of a famous Pink Floyd concert. News of this trip prompts us to ask him about his alleged prog rock sympathies – how the young Greenwood brother might be taking Radiohead into more abstracted and 'difficult' areas.

He reckons this is half a joke, because there's only a couple of tunes by the Floyd that he cares for – the first and last tracks on the 'Meddle' album.

He loves the video for 'Paranoid Android', using the animator Magnus Carlsson and the Robin character. Unfortunately, the TV stations aren't quite so accepting...

"It's been censored by MTV," he laughs. "They've taken out all the nipples. And yet they leave in the stuff where a man's sawing through his own limbs, which is peculiar. Whereas if we'd had a beachful of babes in bikinis, grinding away that would have been fine."

Jonny has previously mentioned the difficult terrain of Mile Davis' 1970 jazz-fusion double album, 'Bitches Brew' as a reference. He has badgered Thom about this music for years, and the singer has even suggested that this opus has made its mark on 'OK Computer'. You tell the guitarist that you hear no similarities at all between the two records – not even of Jonny's dreamy sign-off tune 'Lucky', but he's happy to explain the connection.

"We were getting off on the fact that there were two electric pianos and a really trashy drum sound on 'Bitches Brew'. But we're not going to become a jazz fusion band – luckily we don't have the confidence to go down *that* road..."

Jonny responds to compliments and funny stories by saying "Bless", like a groovy young vicar. He thinks it's hilarious that Duncan, his tattooed guitar tech has another job during the gigs now – bringing a little glockenspeil out for the 'No Surprises' song, which embarrasses the old road dog. Such are the demands that come with a job on the all-action 'Head experience.

When you ask him to explain the method behind the band sound – how three guitarists and so many mad ideas are lashed

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Ooh the fragility! The sensitivity!... Ssshwoon!

Ooh, they're a ROM bunch...

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into unusually great songs, he pulls his Jackie Onassis fringe behind his ear and smiles.

"The most exciting time for me is when we've got what we suspect to be an amazing song, but nobody knows what they're gonna play on it. And that's the best feeling. Because that's when something happens. You should watch us rehearse. Everyone just clusters around their own individual amp, working stuff out. All you can hear is drums and Thom's vocals. And after a week or a day – or an hour – people tentatively turn up and say, 'What do you think?' It's the best part of being in a band in a way. That, and the gigs."

And how does the whole classical thing fit into this?

"Well, we stole a lot of Polish composer Penderecki's string ideas. Rock arrangements haven't changed much since the days of The Beatles and 'Eleanor Rigby'. And if bands *do* want to get weird things with strings, they just put them through effects.

"We've found all these composers that are still getting new sounds out of violins. On the last chord of our song, 'Climbing Up The Walls', there's this block of white noise you can make when 16 violins are playing quarter tones apart from each other. It's the most frightening sound – like *insects* or something. But it's beautiful."

Radiohead used to play Messaen over the PA system before a gig, didn't they?

"Everyone's leaping on Philip Glass and all these minimalist composers, but Messaen and all this stuff from the '40s and '50s, it's so lyrical and beautiful, and not difficult to listen to at all. It's all been overlooked .

"At school, I remember being excited by a composer who was still alive at the time and still writing. It was a very musical school, but I was surrounded by all these kids who said, 'Yeah, we like rock music – The Beatles and Simon & Garfunkel', that kind of crap. Or even worse, they were into Mozart and Enya. You played them Joy Division and they'd say, 'Oh no, he's out of tune, isn't he?'"

Before you joined the band, you kept turning up with different instruments, desperate to join. Why were you so obsessed with the idea?

"I'd heard tapes of Thom's songs before I joined, and I couldn't get over the fact that if I played an Elvis Costello record and then his stuff, the songs were as good. And yet he was 16 and at my school. A handful of those songs would stand up today."

In the 'Paranoid Android' video, the angel takes sad little Robin to heaven, where they get to watch a game of ping-pong. What's your vision of paradise?

"A big empty room with the band and all these half-written songs. There are good songs coming up, and we're sticking them on the B-sides. We're lucky, 'cos we're still at the stage when I can pester Thom at all hours of the night and we'll go to the rehearsal room together and just play. It's the best thing to do."

So is there less trauma in the band these days?

"We're still capable of producing enormous trauma for ourselves, unfortunately. But I suppose it's good – it's the opposite of getting fat and lazy and rich.

"Still, it's so dangerous to *rely* on anything like that. It's like courting despair, because you think the songs will be better. You can't do it. Which is why 'OK Computer' is such a break for us. It's so outward looking and descriptive. It's an exciting time. I feel like Thom's written about everything, which is breathtaking."

THE ARTISTS' enclosure backstage at the Tibetan Freedom Concert on Randall's Island is like a rock'n'roll village in miniature. Radiohead's tent is to the left of Noel Gallagher's, with Dave Grohl on the right. U2 and Patti Smith are directly opposite .

As the day gets going, the various players will stroll into the central square and greet each other, forming little star clusters, comparing experiences and renewing friendships. Occasionally, a Buddhist monk, a supermodel, Chuck D or a Beastie Boy will stroll over and join the melee.

When there's a good band on, many of the artists will check it out from the side of the stage. Everyone's there for Patti, sharing the fun with their families, watching the fury of 'Rock And Roll Nigger' that's still a fire-starter after so many years. And there's another act that everyone's talking about. Radiohead's must-see value has never been higher within this community.

Watching so many famous names, you realise that most of them have developed this facility to help them deal with hustlers and incidental grief. It's not exactly the same as the thousand-yard stare that American GIs brought back with them from Vietnam. But there's something similar going on; a shut-off technique, a way of drawing inwards when the pressure gets too much.

You appreciate it when Patti Smith makes her way back to the enclosure, tunnelling her way through the crowds, talking to her kids like they're the only people around, blanking out the journalists and photographers who all want something off her. It's evident in the walk and the poise that says, don't even think about it.

And you feel for Noel Gallagher, newly married and who should, by rights, be having a nice honeymoon. But instead he has to keep moving – even when he's inside the enclosure, avoiding eye contact, his asshole detector perpetually wired up. Just a second's hesitation, a word with the wrong person, and the incoming fire will begin.

Thom Yorke is moving into that scene now. Everybody wants a photo, a TV interview, a favour for a friend. It's probably best that he's in the company of Michael Stipe much of the time, who's introducing him to other artists, vibing him up, developing a friendship that began on the 'Monster' tour and blossomed in London during the sessions for the *Velvet Goldmine* soundtrack – when Michael, Thom, Jonny Greenwood and Bernard Butler were having a hilarious time in the studio, getting into the glam aesthetic, performing Roxy Music songs.

You'd like to ask Thom about some of this stuff, but he's elected not to speak to the British press. Consequently, you feel like a voyeur, taking in the sights, but under a moral obligation not to get involved.

There's a particularly weird moment when Stipe puts his arms around Thom and starts hugging him, and the English boy realises he's being watched. He tenses up, and Michael lets him go again.

Colin Greenwood is on the sidelines, taking one of the day's numerous reality checks. He's quietly worried in that his sneakers may have been made in China, a sartorial mistake on a day that these Tibetan pressure groups are publicising the Western world's collaboration with the occupying force from Peking.

Colin mentions, almost in passing, that himself and Thom went out for dinner with Bono a few nights earlier. Yorke is passing as we speak, and the conversation changes again, as the frontman realises that a female Tibetan singer is on later, and Thom's got one of her records. And then he's remembering how a Buddhist monk once visited his school for a talk, and it was fascinating stuff, except the other boys were taking the piss out of him – unforgivable.

Earlier in the day, you'd travelled with the band through New York, over the river to the venue and they were sorting out a set list for the gig en route. Half an hour on stage, and so many important songs. At one stage they realised that 'Paranoid Android' and 'Lucky' together would take up a huge percentage of the allotted time. That's all been beautifully resolved by 1.30 in the afternoon, when they open their show with 'Fake Plastic Trees'. Most acts today have opted for noise and adrenaline, a hit-and-run approach. Radiohead are playing it slow, allowing Thom's notes to hang there, pulling you into the feeling.

The music bounces off the back of the stadium and eases the crowd into a dreamlike state. 'Talk Show Host' follows, a submarine, trip-hop song without the conceptualising and aren't-we-clever baggage that other acts bring to such experiments. This sets the crowd up for 'Paranoid Android', most of them hearing it for the first time, and they're astonished.

Thom's black shirt accentuates his thin frame, but he's feeling empowered now. He introduces 'The Bends' with a rant about the abuses which the major corporations throw at the world. Today, that means the involvement of firms like McDonald's, Disney and Holiday Inn, who are plugging into the Chinese economy, despite its human rights record.

You remember that 'OK Computer' was partly inspired by Will Hutton's *The State We're In*, a terrifying account of Britain under the (then still-ruling) Conservatives. The writer described how they deregulated the economy, brought market forces and unrestrained capitalism into the welfare sector, how they crapped on the manual workers and the disenfranchised from a great height.

There's a sense of that frustration in Thom's voice, in the tensions meshed into the song, in the dynamics of this extraordinary band. And while there's not much that a little singer and a few tunes can achieve against the towering cynicism of commerce, such a voice and this particular context, at least it amounts to *something*.

That's also the message you get from 'OK Computer'. The world is savage, perverted, bone-crushingly callous, but Radiohead are still engaging their humanity in there, lifting a few souls in the process.

Maybe, as the year's greatest song allows us to hope, the nourishing rain may yet fall. God may even love his children, yeah.

Enough already, you mad sexy fool...

"We're still capable of producing enormous trauma for ourselves, unfortunately. But I suppose it's good – it's the opposite of getting fat and lazy and rich." – Jonny